

Maidan boys rule the turf

Sharma and Rahane, who honed their skills in the Mumbai school of batting, take India out of trouble with a big partnership

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
RANCHI, OCTOBER 19

VIRAT KOHLI had made a clean sweep of the toss in the series, but India's ambitions of doing so on the scorecard had suffered an early jolt at 39 for three, with the captain himself one of the casualties. Kohli looked out of sorts during his short innings, playing and missing with a flat-footed drive off Anrich Nortje before being trapped in front by one that came in after pitching.

The surface was offering decent, and occasionally, variable bounce on Day One. Rohit Sharma was looking edgy at the other end, with Kagiso Rabada, who had already accounted for Mayank Agarwal and Cheteshwar Pujara, administering a stiff test.

However, Ajinkya Rahane came and looked in the groove from the first ball itself. He clipped the first ball off his toes to mid-wicket and when Proteas skipper Faf du Plessis brought on another mid-wicket, a shortish one, he bisected the two for a couple next ball.

Rahane's positive approach gave Rohit the space to grow into the game at his own pace. At the end of the day, Rohit was unbeaten on 117 – his third century of the series, sixth overall in 30 Tests – when bad light followed by rain ended the day's play six overs after tea. Rahane was batting on 83 and India, thanks to an unbroken 185-run fourth wicket partnership, had raced to 224 for three. Rohit, in the process, achieved the record of hitting most number of sixes in a Test series, 17.

Fans of a certain vintage have grown up watching Mumbai batsmen dominating Indian cricket. Mumbai batting pairs putting on century partnerships used to be normal in the 1980s and '90s; be it Sunil Gavaskar and Dilip Vengsarkar, or Sachin Tendulkar and Sanjay Manjrekar, or Tendulkar and Vinod Kambli (for a brief period). Things changed over the past two decades because the Indian team gradually became an assortment of players from almost every part of the country. Smaller cities started to rise and produce players, more so since the emergence of a Ranchi boy, answering to the name of MS Dhoni. Indian cricket thrived due to the game's expansion into every nook and cranny.

From that perspective, two players from the Mumbai maidans, displaying the 'Mumbai school of batting' and helping India come out of the woods happened after a long time. But as India's batting coach Vikram Rathour pointed out after the day's play: "Khadoos cricket that Mumbaikars used to play has changed now. You see Mumbaikars play a lot many more shots now. And you see some very, very solid players from other parts of India now. So, we weren't even looking at it as Mumbaikars' partnership. It was two good players who batted well for the Indian team today."

Rohit vs Rabada

The contest between Rohit and Rabada in the morning session was fascinating. Even after lunch, the South Africa quick bowled another top spell, and Rohit had to tough it out. Rahane took charge during that period, taking three fours off a Rabada over. The Indian Test vice-captain showed a lot of intent and his positivity kept the scoreboard moving at a brisk pace. Later, when Rohit was in his element, he became the aggressor.

Test cricket was resplendent in its ebb and flow, punches and counter-punches; but what a shame that barely 5,000-odd spectators turned up on the first day, on a weekend.

Coming back to Rohit's knock, fluidity started to arrive towards the end of the first session, when he dispatched Ngidi to the mid-wicket boundary with a short-arm pull. Another pull off Nortje a couple of overs later cleared the long leg fence. In between, Zubayr Hamza at short leg put down a tough chance off debutant left-arm spinner George Linde. It was, in fact Linde's first over in Test cricket and he was unlucky, while Rohit, dropped on 28, capitalised on the reprieve.

A glorious off-drive off Nortje took Rohit to his half-century. Then, he started to accelerate. He milked Linde, played a contemptuous inside-out extra-cover drive against Ngidi before decimating Dane



Ajinkya Rahane and Rohit Sharma celebrate after the latter reached his third ton of the series. Sharma and Rahane added 185* runs for the third wicket. PTI



Security personnel thrash a pitch invader on Day One of the third Test between India and South Africa at Ranchi's JSCA Stadium on Saturday. AP

Piedt. The opener reached his hundred hitting a six off Piedt over long-off. The decision to promote him to the top of the order has proved to be a masterstroke.

"I always believed he (Rohit) is too good a player not to be playing in any format. It was a good call to make him open. With the amount of runs he has scored, he has settled the issue for the time being. Somebody of his experience and the kind of cricket he plays, if he starts coming good at the top of the order, it changes everything for the Indian team, even when you are touring," Rathour said.

South Africa sent Temba Bavuma for the coin toss but he didn't do any better than his skipper. The visitors lost the toss for the third time on the spin. They made five changes to their playing XI, including two debutants in Heinrich Klaasen and Linde. But yet again, they surrendered the initiative after making early inroads. Batting would be difficult in the fourth innings on this pitch, and the Saffers are already playing catch-up.

2x In three matches of the India-SA series, Rohit Sharma has doubled the number of his Test match hundreds to 6. Rohit's aggregate in the series is 434 runs (after Day 1) and it's more than twice the tally of South Africa's highest scorer – Dean Elgar (216).

SCORECARD >> India vs South Africa

3rd Test | Ranchi | Toss: India

INDIA 224/3 IN 58 ov
M Agarwal c Elgar b Rabada **10** (19b, 2x4)
R Sharma not out **117** (164b, 14x4, 4x6)
C Pujara lbw b Rabada **0** (9b)
V Kohli lbw b Nortje **12** (22b, 2x4)
A Rahane not out **83** (135b, 11x4, 1x6)

■ **Extras:** (b 1, nb 1) 2
■ **Fall of wickets:** 1-12 (Mayank Agarwal, 4.6 ov), 2-16 (Cheteshwar Pujara, 8.3 ov), 3-39 (Virat Kohli, 15.3 ov)

■ **Bowling:**
K Rabada 14-5-**54-2**
L Ngidi 11-4-**36-0**
A Nortje 16-3-**50-1**
G Linde 11-1-**40-0**
D Piedt 6-0-**43-0**

Nortje rues missed chances after India recover from 39/3

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
RANCHI, OCTOBER 19

SOUTH AFRICAN pacer Anrich Nortje on Saturday rued letting India off the hook after reducing them to 39 for three on the opening day of the third and final Test here.

Hoping to avoid a 3-0 whitewash, South African bowlers gave a good account of themselves by taking three wickets quickly, but Rohit Sharma and Ajinkya Rahane shared an unbeaten 185-run partnership to take India to 224/3 in 58 overs when bad weather forced an early stumps.

Rohit slammed his third century of the series during a knock in which he grew in confidence. There were chances too: he successfully reviewed an LBW decision before getting a reprieve on 28 when Zubayr Hamza dropped a difficult chance.

"We were definitely better as in the previous Test. We just tried to control the game little bit better. Unfortunately, we couldn't get another wicket... It would have been nice to have them four-five down," Nortje said after the first day's play.

"We had one or two overs where we went on top, later on we just pulled it back again. So, maybe, here and there we lost but, in general, a good effort by everyone.

"Overall, it was a good effort by the bowlers. There was little bit in it this morning, tried to utilise as much but one or two overs didn't go our way."

Kagiso Rabada was the pick of the attack with 2/54 in 14 overs, while Nortje (1/50 from 16 overs) picked up the wicket of India skipper Virat Kohli. "I was hoping for a wicket somewhere and to get him was unbelievable, but just try and come with a plan. I try and put as much pressure as possible and finally got the wicket."

Hailing Rabada's effort, he said: "He bowled really well. He was asking the right questions everytime. I thought Lungi backed him up as well. The (bowling) partnership up front was quite decent, so all credit to them."

He said there's still hope in the side as they look to bounce back.



Anrich Nortje dismissed Kohli for 12. AP

"I think there were quite a lot of opportunities right through the series. Lots of nicks going through the gaps or falling short. Something happened today here there, that's normal to cricket. We have to take it forward going from here. Just keep on asking those questions and control the controllables, I guess."

Nortje disagreed that their bowlers were finding it difficult to cope with the SG ball.

"We have practised with it so I won't blame that. We have used that in South Africa before we got here."

The wicket had some uneven bounce, especially in the first session, and Nortje said: "Definitely it was keeping a bit low at stages, ball hitting the bottom of the bat. Bit of movement but we will have to wait and see.

"I don't know about the next few days... Maybe we will get even or low consistently but ball staying low will have effect for the seamers I don't know about spinners."

Another Delhi-based bookie being probed in KPL fixing scandal

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
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THE CENTRAL Crime Branch (CCB) unit of the Bengaluru police has identified a second bookie from New Delhi allegedly involved in luring players to indulge in game manipulation in the Karnataka Premier League (KPL).

The second bookie, Jatin Sethi, who was identified in the CCB investigation into illegal betting and match-fixing in the KPL approached a court in Bengaluru for anticipatory bail this week.

The CCB believe he is the missing link and have launched a search for him.

Sethi and another Delhi-based bookie Sanyam Gulati, who's at large, allegedly asked cricketers to underperform in the KPL this August. The identities of Sethi and Gulati emerged in the CCB probe following the arrest of Ali Asfak Thara, 40, owner of the KPL team Belagavi Panthers, and a celebrity drummer Bhavesh Bafna, 26 who has been part of tournaments like the KPL, Tamil Nadu Premier League and the Indian Premier League.

The Belagavi Panthers team owner Ali Asfak Thara was arrested last month for placing bets on KPL matches with a bookie allegedly based in Dubai. Thara is alleged to have influenced many players in the KPL with regard to the illegal betting racket.

The CCB police arrested the celebrity drummer Bafna last month on the basis of a complaint given by Bhavesh Gulecha, 26, a fast bowler for the Bellary Tuskers team in the 2019 KPL season. Gulecha has given a statement to the police saying he was approached by his childhood friend Bafna to give away more than 10 runs in an over in a match.

According to the version provided by Gulecha to the police he was offered a spot in an IPL team and Rs 2 lakh as advance if he agreed to meet bookie Sanyam Gulati and agree to spot-fixing in KPL games.

The celebrity drummer who was arrested on October 2 has also sought bail in the betting case. In the course of bail hearings Bafna's lawyers refuted allegations that the drummer used to send signals to cricketers who had allegedly agreed to indulge in corruption by playing the drums in a certain pattern.

According to police sources Bafna has claimed during questioning that the bookies approached him first during TNPL matches by claiming to be big fans of his drumming skills. "Based in Bengaluru, he (Bafna) used to work on behalf of bookies in Delhi and Mumbai," a senior crime branch police official said.

The investigations into betting and match fixing in the KPL were opened up by the CCB police on the basis of inputs provided by the anti-corruption unit of the BCCI on the heels of allegations of illegal betting and match fixing in the TNPL.

Delhi face Gujarat in Vijay Hazare quarters

Bengaluru: After an longish league phase of the Vijay Hazare Trophy, eight teams have qualified for the knockout phase beginning here on Sunday with Delhi playing its quarterfinal against Gujarat.

Defending champion Mumbai will take on Chhattisgarh while Tamil Nadu will square off against Punjab. Both matches will be played on October 21. Chhattisgarh defeated the Shreyas Iyer-led team in the league stage.

Elsewhere, Manish Pandey-led Karnataka won seven of their eight matches in Group A and face newcomers Pondicherry in the quarters. Pandey, with 505 runs from eight matches, has been in good nick along with opener Devdutt Padikkal. But they will be wary of a competent Pondicherry side which includes, among others, former Karnataka star Vinay Kumar.

Fixtures

OCTOBER 20: Karnataka vs Pondicherry; Delhi vs Gujarat.

OCTOBER 21: Tamil Nadu vs Punjab; Chhattisgarh vs Mumbai.

TEST CAP NO: 296

Nadeem's India cap comes after 15 years of First-Class cricket, 424 wickets

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
RANCHI, OCTOBER 19

"JUNG JAARI hai (the fight is on). One day, they will come and pick you for the Indian team," Shahbaz Nadeem's father Javed Mahmood told his younger son. Nadeem's response was, "I won't give up. I'm playing for India A, and will play for India one day."

Javed recounted the conversation the day Nadeem eventually made his Test debut, that too on his home patch. The left-arm spinner was drafted in as cover for the injured Kuldeep Yadav, who had a sore shoulder. As India batting coach Vikram Rathour said, the team management wanted to go with three spinners on this JSCA Stadium pitch. So Nadeem replaced Ishant Sharma in the playing XI.

Nadeem personifies perseverance. He

made his first-class debut in 2004 and over the next 15 seasons, through 110 first-class matches, has picked 424 wickets. Last year, the Jharkhand spinner rewrote record books in List A cricket, when he picked eight wickets for 10 runs against Rajasthan in the Vijay Hazare Trophy. He had three five-fors in four innings during India A's tour of the West Indies earlier this year. But the 30-year-old was striving to reach the next level.

Nadeem's family already had to deal with a budding cricketer giving up the game in frustration. Nadeem's elder brother Asad Iqbal decided to pursue a career in engineering, when he wasn't picked for the India colts. "Asad was the first cricketer in our family. He even became the East Zone U-19 captain. He was an all-rounder. But when uncertainty loomed, with regard to his cricket career, we decided that it would be too risky if both my sons took up cricket as a career. Do beta hain,



Left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem has played 110 First-Class matches.

dono barbad ho jayenge to hum logon ko budhapa mein kaun dekhega (we have two sons

and if both their careers are destroyed, who would look after us when we get old)," Javed told *The Sunday Express*. A retired police officer, he was transferred from Muzaffarpur to Dhanbad when his sons were in school.

Asad sacrificed his cricketing ambition to ensure his younger brother could play the game without any pressure.

Nadeem was one of the fittest boys in his school, even when he was just 10 years old. His father attributed it to genetics. "I was a champion athlete at the university level. Shahbaz used to win all sprint events – 100m, 200m, 400m – when he was in Class IV or V. This is something which he got from me," Javed said. Fitness has kept the Jharkhand spinner in the game for a long time.

Nadeem initially wanted to be a pace bowler but his childhood coach Imtiaz Hussain made him a spinner. "When he

came to our coaching camp for the trial, I told him to bowl spin instead. I told him that with his physique and height, he couldn't become a fast bowler. But I assured him that he could go far if he took up spin bowling," Hussain told this paper.

At Tata Digwadih Stadium in Dhanbad, Nadeem had his first lessons in organised cricket, on a matting wicket. He progressed to play Ranji Trophy for Jharkhand but with his career still at a nascent stage, he decided to move to Kolkata and joined Town Club, with an eye to play for Bengal. Things didn't work out as planned and Nadeem decided to return home.

According to Hussain, former Jharkhand State Cricket Association (JSCA) president and current BCCI acting secretary Amitabh Choudhary helped Nadeem revive his career. "Amitabh Choudhary ensured that his talent didn't go waste. Nadeem was given a chance

to play for Jharkhand and he steadily rose through the ranks."

Hussain described his ward as "obedient". Only once did Nadeem receive a serious dressing-down from his coach. He was entering into adulthood, when for a while he lost focus. Hussain was initially reluctant to recall the incident, but eventually narrated it briefly.

"It was a different type of incident. Young *ladke mein ladkiyon ka chakkar hota hai na, aisa hi kuch hua tha* (young guys get attracted to girls). It wasn't a big deal but I felt it would hamper his cricket. But that relationship didn't work out. Later, he got married to a lady from Jharia."

On Saturday, Nadeem received his Test cap from his skipper. "He was in Kolkata a couple of days back. Now he is playing a Test. Delighted for him," Virat Kohli said at the toss.